

Proper Tree Planting in Oklahoma

Planting trees is a rewarding endeavor that enhances your property's beauty, environmental quality, and value. Proper tree planting is crucial for ensuring the long-term health and stability of the tree. This guide provides comprehensive steps for successful tree planting in Oklahoma, considering the state's unique climate and soil conditions.

Selecting the Right Tree

Choosing a tree species well-suited to Oklahoma's environment is the first step. Factors to consider include soil type, drainage, sunlight availability, and the tree's mature size. Oklahoma State University Extension lists recommended tree species for various landscape needs. For instance, the Caddo Sugar Maple (*Acer saccharum* 'Caddo') is known for its adaptability to Oklahoma's climate.

Optimal Planting Time

The ideal planting time varies depending on the type of tree and its root condition. For instance, early fall is optimal for container-grown and balled-and-burlapped (B&B) trees, allowing roots to establish before winter. However, bare-root trees should be planted in early spring while dormant.

Site Selection and Preparation

Proper site selection is vital for the tree's health and longevity. Consider the tree's mature size to ensure adequate space for both canopy and root development. Avoid planting near overhead power lines, underground utilities, or structures. Before digging, contact local utility companies to mark underground lines. Ensure the site offers appropriate sunlight and soil conditions for the selected species.

Planting Process

1. **Digging the Hole:** Dig a hole two to three times wider than the root ball and of equal depth. A wide hole allows roots to spread easily into the surrounding soil. The root flare (where the trunk widens at the base) should be at or slightly above ground level.
2. **Handling the Tree:**
 - *Bare-Root Trees:* Keep roots moist before planting. Prune any damaged roots.
 - *B&B Trees:* To prevent root ball disturbance, place the tree in the hole with the burlap intact. Once positioned, remove any synthetic materials, and cut away the top third of the burlap.
 - *Container Trees:* Gently remove the tree from the container. If roots are circling the root ball, make several vertical cuts to encourage outward growth.
3. **Backfilling:** Refill the hole with the original soil, breaking up clumps and removing debris. Avoid directly adding fertilizers or organic matter into the planting hole which can hinder root establishment. Lightly tamp the soil to eliminate air pockets.
4. **Watering:** Thoroughly settle the soil around the roots after planting. Maintaining consistent soil moisture during the first growing season ensures the soil is moist but not waterlogged.
5. **Mulching:** Apply a 2- to 4-inch layer of mulch, such as wood chips or bark, around the base of the tree, extending to the drip line. Keep mulch a few inches away from the trunk to prevent rot. Mulching helps conserve moisture, regulate soil temperature, and suppress weeds.

Staking and Protection

Staking is generally unnecessary unless the tree is unstable due to root ball size or windy conditions. If staking is required, use broad, flexible ties and remove them after one year to prevent girdling. Protect young trees from wildlife damage by installing trunk guards or fencing as needed.

Aftercare

Regular maintenance during the first few years is crucial for tree establishment:

- **Watering:** Provide deep, infrequent watering to encourage deep root growth.
- **Pruning:** Remove only dead or damaged branches during the first year. Structural pruning can begin in the second or third year to promote a strong framework.
- **Fertilization:** Generally, newly planted trees do not require immediate fertilization. Conduct a soil test before applying fertilizers in subsequent years.

By following these guidelines, you can ensure the successful establishment and growth of your new tree, contributing to your landscape's environmental and aesthetic value.

References

<https://extension.okstate.edu/fact-sheets/tree-planting-guide.html>

<https://extension.okstate.edu/fact-sheets/planting-trees-and-shrubs.html>

<https://pods.okstate.edu/fact-sheets/L-440-Tree-Planting-Guide2021.pdf>

<https://extension.okstate.edu/programs/gardening/grow-gardening-columns/grow-columns-2021/march-28-2021-placement-of-trees.html>

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